



## **Skyrocketing Gas and Food Prices Put Hungry Seniors at Greater Risk**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**June 3, 2008, Alexandria, VA** — A survey of Meals On Wheels programs in all 50 states, conducted by the Meals On Wheels Association of America (MOWAA) between May 22 and May 30, paints a graphic and disturbing picture of the serious impact that skyrocketing gas and food prices are having on Senior Nutrition Programs— and the frail, vulnerable homebound seniors they serve— in communities across America.

A majority (58%) of Meals On Wheels programs responding reported that they had lost volunteers due to gas prices. These programs have traditionally relied on hundreds of thousands of volunteers each day to make meal deliveries to the homes of clients and to check in on these isolated individuals. This loss of manpower from the volunteer workforce has had deleterious consequences for the operation of many Meals On Wheels programs. For example, nearly half (48.3%) of the programs responding indicated that increases in gas prices had forced them to eliminate meal delivery routes or to consolidate their meal services. Although the manner in which these changes are implemented differed from program to program and community to community, one fact remains the same. Already-vulnerable seniors, who rely on Meals On Wheels for meals and other life-sustaining nutritional support, are being put at even greater risk of hunger, poor health and nutritional status, and even loss of life.

In describing how they are coping with increased food and gas prices, well over one third (38.2%) of the Meals On Wheels programs reported a change in the type of meals served. One commonly-cited change was movement away from hot, freshly prepared meals to frozen meals. This shift went hand-in-hand with another cost-cutting measure, namely a reduction in the frequency of delivery of meals (30.2%). Some Meals On Wheels programs that have routinely delivered one hot meal per day, five days per week, are finding it necessary to make a single delivery per week consisting of one hot meal and four frozen meals. Others have eliminated the hot meal entirely.

“It is almost impossible to overstate the seriousness of the situation,” said Enid A. Borden, President and CEO of MOWAA, “because the impact for Meals On Wheels clients are not ‘pocketbook’ issues as they are for other Americans. They are health and welfare and even life and death issues.” To illustrate the point, Ms. Borden quoted a survey comment MOWAA received from a rurally-based program in California: “We have had to put seniors on frozen

routes that receive a 14 day supply of dinners. By eliminating routes the daily check on seniors is gone and we have been told that two different seniors were found dead and had been deceased for as many as 7 days. Daily contact is needed; it saves lives.”

More than one fifth (21.8%) of the programs responded that they were actually forced to reduce the number of meals that they served and well over a third (38.2%) had to resort to reducing the number of clients the program could accept. “In my 15 years at MOWAA,” Borden continued, “I have come to know Meals On Wheels programs as heroes. They literally save and improve lives daily. I have been equally impressed with their creativity, ingenuity, ability to stretch always limited resources beyond what most of us could ever imagine. But there is a limit to how far that can go, and we are approaching that limit. The hard reality is that the number of seniors needing meals is not shrinking— in fact, it is growing— and the commitment and passion of programs to meet those needs remains strong. But it is getting increasingly difficult to meet our mission and the moral imperative of assuring “. . . no senior goes hungry”® because of factors literally beyond our control.”

Borden and MOWAA Member programs acknowledge that a solution to the problem is complex and not likely to occur overnight. Additionally, no single entity has the power to devise the whole solution. “It is a national problem and solving it should be a national priority,” declared Borden. “There are changes that need to be made at the federal level, and MOWAA is calling on Congress today to increase appropriations for Senior Nutrition Programs significantly— by at least 10% over the current year— to help address this catastrophe. Even that won’t be sufficient and the communities that have always supported these programs need to contribute as well. New volunteers and donations are always needed at the local level. So today we are calling on all Americans to pitch in.”

The Meals On Wheels Association of America is the oldest and largest national organization in the United States representing those programs that provide meals to people in need. To obtain more information about MOWAA or to locate a local Meals On Wheels program, visit the MOWAA website at [www.mowaa.org](http://www.mowaa.org).

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